



**National RAP Conference 2019: Walking Together, Working Together**  
**Glen Kelly's Keynote Speech – Looking Forward**  
**24 October 2019**

**Acknowledgements and introduction:**

- Thanks Fred – a titan of reconciliation and an inspiration to all.
- I'd like to acknowledge the Whadjuk Nyungar people, the traditional owners of the country on which we gather, and I'd like to acknowledge our elders and those who have gone before us.
- I would also like to acknowledge all the conference partners and attendees, and I would particularly like to acknowledge and recognise Reconciliation WA, an organisation of extraordinary people who have been able to and continue to achieve great things for reconciliation in this City and this State.
- My name is Glen Kelly, I am Wardandi Nyungar from the lower south west of Western Australia, my country is Busselton, Margaret River, August, Manjimup – that area of our state.
- As well as being an RA director, I've recently commenced a role in the Forum for Directors of Indigenous Organisation or FDIO, which plays a support and capacity building role for Directors and CEOs of Aboriginal organisations
- Prior to this I spent a couple of good years with KPMG, and I maintain and continue my association with KPMG, particularly the Indigenous services area.

- I have however, spent most of my professional life in the native title area, holding a 10 year tenure as the CEO of the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council or SWALSC, the native title representative body of the South West, prior to serving as the CEO of the National Native Title Council.
- I'd like to talk to you about the future of this reconciliation journey that we are all on together
- To reflect upon where we are at.
- To consider some of the challenges and things for us to think about going forward.
- And how we can leverage the existing engagement – that is the collective power that in this room – to progress the justice, equality and reconciliation that will be paramount to building sustainable and lasting changes, that benefit us all.

### **Gains made**

- As Fred mentioned, the momentum for change has gained traction thanks to the efforts of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Reconciliation Australia and many other organisations.
- Having spent most of my career working in native title, I've seen the reconciliation and native title arenas grow together, in fact I feel they're closely linked.
- For example, the right to negotiate contained in the native title act ultimately gave cause for industry and after some time, governments, to pause and rethink their approach to working with Indigenous people
- It moved from largely adversarial to one which is largely based on negotiation and reaching agreement.

- This rethinking of approach opened new conversations and new ideas which assisted the aspirations and advancement of the reconciliation movement and the rise of the RAP program.
- Equally, the reconciliation movement, the people involved in it and the ideas they were presenting assisted this reflection in the native title arena to occur, in turn creating space for better approaches to be taken and better outcomes to be reached.
- And so it goes, each sector benefiting the other.
- My point here is that in my view, the reconciliation movement has created critical space and been a strong enabler for the advancement of Indigenous rights and interests.
- It's allowed or even given permission for critical conversations to occur, and this has resulted in substantial and substantive positive movement in the lives of Indigenous people across the country.
- I'm also of the view that the ongoing reconciliation conversation has opened space for what may be the next stage of substantial and substantive change, that of the proposals within the Uluru Statement, proposals I see as key to achieving the aims that reconciliation espouses.
- The success of these proposals is sadly, still uncertain, although we see that RAP organisations are joining the growing chorus to see them brought to life.
- Testament I think, to the importance of the Reconciliation movement and Reconciliation Action Plans.

### **Nation building - who do we want to be?**

- Next year, we mark 20 years since the inception of Reconciliation Australia and 20 years since those impressive scenes, when over

250 thousand people walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in support for reconciliation.

- When you think of where you might be in the next 20 years, I want you to also imagine what sort of nation you want to be living in.

### *PAUSE*

- What are the things you want to see change? What would make you proud to call Australia home?
- When I think about this – I imagine a future where every Noongar, Murri, Koori person – where every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person – can live a prosperous, healthy, self determined life where they have every opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Where the Indigenous Voice is properly represented and heard.
- Where the truth has been told and accepted.
- And where Makkarata, in appropriate form, has been achieved.
- I imagine a future where every Australian is immensely proud to be living in a nation that's home to the longest, continuing culture on earth.
- And of course, my future is one where we no longer see, year after year, the appalling gaps in life outcomes and life expectancies experienced by First Nations peoples, compared to the wider Australian population.
- I believe that we *will* be able to achieve this future. And that by working together – we *can* rise to challenge.

## Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program

- We have some strong clues as to our progress towards this.
- As each of you know, the strength of Reconciliation Action Plans or the RAP program is that it provides a framework via the themes relationships, respect and opportunities – which allow an organisation to set out their own reconciliation objectives and actions, in line with their own business objectives.
- A RAP gives an organisation a starting point, a process and a recognition
- It means that organisations starting out aren't alone and can be confident while organisations with a long track history can be as sophisticated in this area as they are in their broader operations
- From eight organisations in 2006 – to over 1100 who have an active RAP<sup>1</sup> today – we've seen the impact that that RAPs can have.
- The 2018 RAP Impact Measurement Report reveals organisations with a RAP:
  - employed more than 41,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
  - purchased more than \$634 million worth of goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses
  - Established or maintained more than 13,000 partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- All up, organisations with a RAP boast a combined workforce of 2.7 million.
- That's close to one in five working Australians

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<sup>1</sup> As well as Curtin University (organising partner for RAP conference) and Woodside (welcome event partner), other notable WA organisations with a RAP include: WA Police Force, the West Coast Eagles and Edith Cowan University.

- The Report also shows that more than 120,000 employees in RAP organisations participated in online cultural learning.
- And that almost 60,000 employees took part in face-to-face cultural learning.
- This is a network of immense depth and breadth, and in many respects I remain astounded but very grateful that so many have put their hands up to join us on this journey.

### **Measuring reconciliation and the Australian Reconciliation Barometer**

- As you would also likely know, in 2016 through the State of Reconciliation in Australia report, RA developed a holistic concept of what it takes to become a reconciled country.
- Drawing on policy research, evidence of reconciliation processes from other countries and our own experiences here, a framework for achieving our vision of a just, equitable and reconciled nation was developed resulting in the five dimensions of reconciliation as the framework and yardstick by which we measure our success.

Those five dimensions are:

#### Race relations

where positive two-way relationships built on trust and respect exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians.

#### Equality and Equity

where Indigenous Australians participate equally in life opportunities and our unique rights are recognised and upheld – where our voice is heard.

### Institutional integrity

where our political, business and community institutions actively support all dimensions of reconciliation.

### Unity

where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and rights are valued as part of our shared national identity; and

### Historical acceptance

where all Australians understand and accept our nation's full history and agree that the wrongs of the past will never be repeated – *truth telling project*

- Together those five dimensions are the basis for our reconciliation discussion and actions, and for measuring progress.
- We measure our progress through a survey called the Australian Reconciliation Barometer which has been conducted every two years since 2008.
- The latest (2018) barometer survey tells us that:
  - Support for reconciliation continues to grow.
  - That we all – first nations peoples, and non-Indigenous Australians alike – think our relationship is important.
  - It tells us that Australians want to learn more about the unique, diverse and ancient cultures of our people.
  - And it tells us that more Australians want to learn about the dispossession, discrimination and violence that has characterised Australia's modern history.
- And it's my view that this is in a large part due to the influence of RAPs – they continue to create space.

- It also tells us the large body of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a say in matters that affect them, the undertaking formal truth telling processes and the high level of agreement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia's national identity.
- But, while there is progress in many areas, the barometer also reminds us of the distance we have to travel, with a significant proportion of Aboriginal respondents reporting direct experience of racial abuse and a large proportion of Aboriginal people holding the perception of Australia as a racist country.

### **Workplace RAP Barometer**

- At the same time as the Australian Reconciliation Barometer is conducted, a second "Workplace RAP Barometer" is also conducted which measures the attitudes and perceptions of employees in participating RAP organisations.
- In every measurement category – including questions based on the five dimensions of reconciliation (historical acceptance, unity, institutional integrity, equality and equity, race relations) – those working in RAP organisations had greater knowledge, understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, than those in the broader Australian community.
- This speaks to the important utility of RAPs.
- And what we want of course is for RAPs to drive meaningful partnerships and social change.
- On this we were extremely pleased that during National Reconciliation Week this year, 14 Elevate RAP partners released a joint statement of support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

- With front page advertisements and a joint video, they encouraged their people, industry colleagues and fellow Australians to join them.
- Around the same time, 18 leading Australian law firms (16 of which have a RAP) also issued a joint public response in support of the Uluru Statement.
- Clearly, RAPs have clout and are expanding the voices advocating actions that assist reconciliation.
- This provides us with a clear view that we need to continue to grow and to strengthen the RAP program.
- Not only in numbers but also in form and content – which can only be built from the types of discussion that RAPs encourage in the first place.

### **Challenges to address**

- While the RAP program is clearly one of strong and growing influence, it does attract criticism and like everything, evolves and should improve with time.
- To my mind, this is quite fair enough, so I'm going to spend a little time raising **3** areas for us to think about as we move forward with the RAP programme, both as RA and RAP organisations.
- The first is that we frame our discussion and the development of RAPs on social and economic inequity – on deficit.
- This has two effects – firstly it does not properly acknowledge the strengths that exist within the Indigenous community and frames actions from the 'poor fella' side, even when engaging with those of great capability, asset base, rights base, national and international network or wealth.
- This is a source of great frustration and gives us pause to reflect on how

we frame the conversation and to test whether we can focus on strength based action rather than deficit based action where it is an issue.

- The second and more pressing effect is that it positions Indigenous people in the deficit space without then taking the step of considering the deeper reasons of why.
- The answer to this lies in what can only be labelled the racist and violent policies and laws of Australia's history and to some extent, present.
- This in turn leaves people fairly poorly equipped to understand or deal with the sources of conflict that continue to arise between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.
- Now, I understand that the very mention of the phrase 'racist and violent' is something that makes people uncomfortable.
- But this is the great truth telling project isn't it?
- Hard stories are difficult to tell, but they're also terribly difficult to hear.
- And that's perhaps a source of RAPs power now and into the future, that they can help us go that next step, create that space and make it safe for those things to be both told, and to be heard.
  
- The second challenge for us is the perceived lack of association between what reconciliation means to Aboriginal people, which has its foundation in tasks of political reform as displayed by the Uluru Statement, land rights and native title – and how RAPs can contemplate reconciliation being played out.
- Indigenous people are weary of being the subject of policy and the RAP barometer tells us there is a large body of support for Indigenous people to have a say in and participate in matters that affect us.
- So there is a call for the link between reconciliation, RAPs and these types of aspiration and reform to emerge more assertively in our frameworks and activities going forward.

- This is of course happening already as I have highlighted with Elevate RAP organisations voicing their support of the Uluru statement.
- However there is a body of thought that the reconciliation movement and RAPs could do more to come to grips with this issue, which is something for us to think about and respond to in our continuing development of reconciliation and the RAP program.
- The third challenge is perhaps a theme that cuts through both of the previous, and that is that we can engage more fully in what might be labelled the performative aspects of reconciliation rather than the substantive.
- We can and should celebrate, teach and learn culture, pay our respect, engage in welcomes to country, conduct functions, raise awareness and do those sorts of things. I do these things and will continue to.
- But if that's where we stop, then we haven't really got to where we need to.
- Is an organisations RAP a business document that is embedded in management structures, properly acted upon, bought into by the Board, CEO and senior management? Does it contain action that would be considered substantive as compared to the capacity of the organisation? Does an organisation have an Indigenous work force and can they keep them? Are the commitments being met?
- For most RAP organisations the answer to these questions is yes, however we need to keep measuring ourselves and acknowledging where we might not quite have made the mark on the substantive matters and work towards success in this area.
- Now my response to these issues is often around the idea that what we seek to offer is a pathway for organisations and people to grapple with

what can be really difficult subject matter in a way that is manageable. You can't go from zero to full speed in an instant.

- It quite literally is a journey, writing the words in the plan isn't that onerous, but the discussion and the process leading up to that can be challenging.
- We need to recognise this and encourage people along this journey in a way that works for them while clearly setting out expectations – which escalate of course – providing guidance, support and encouragement.
- We know this can change hearts and minds and this means success, but equally, as we mature, so too should our actions.
  
- Happily, there are many who are well up to the task of continuing the success I outlined earlier and responding to these issues.
  
- And this gives me great optimism, as does the way the RAP network has grown and transformed over the years.
- It comprises a large network of organisations big and small with incredible capacity and capability to advance the aims and aspirations of the reconciliation movement.
- Our opportunity then, and by 'our' I don't mean RA I mean everyone gathered here, is harnessing this network and the great intellect, capability and integrity that it possesses to reflect on progress, celebrate success and to think about where we go next.
- We know that reconciliation is up to everyone – it has to be something that the whole nation contributes to.
- This is not easy – and I hope conferences such as this one – assist RAP organisations to continue to implement their plans for creating a more just, equitable and reconciled nation.

## **Conclusion**

- This year's conference theme is about collaboration and best practice in Indigenous and non-Indigenous engagement. Working together, and Walking together.
- I hope that the sessions and the opportunity to network with our RAP community, provides useful tools and inspiration towards your contribution to the reconciliation journey.
- Personally, I am deeply passionate about progressing reconciliation and empowering Australian institutions to work with First Nations Peoples for a stronger, better future.
- The results of Reconciliation Australia's recent Barometer – and Workplace Barometer – indicate that community attitudes are changing, with the vast majority of Australians now on side with the aims of reconciliation.
- This is indeed very encouraging but good intentions, however, don't always lead to practical, concrete change.
- So we – and I include all Australians of good will in this “we” – must continue to work to ensure that changing attitudes are transformed into changed circumstances.
- I thank you sincerely for the work you do and I encourage you to continue, and to walk beside first nations people.
- If ever there was a time to do so, it is now.

**Thank you and good morning.**